



New Sunnyside grant likely

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Ripon Commonwealth Press

Dec. 11, 2008

Officials leading the way in a proposed purchase of the former Sunnyside Farm are confident a state grant will be awarded that would reimburse most or all taxpayer costs. If this confidence turns into reality, it means the Green Lake School District would pay little or nothing to own about 38 acres of the historic property — being offered for \$345,000.

A \$115,000 grant has already been awarded, leaving the school to pay \$230,000 at most. Now officials are eyeing another state grant that could take care of the balance. They're confident in this. "We hope and believe it will happen," said Charlie Marks, administrator of the Green Lake Sanitary District, who has worked closely with the school in this venture. "I think we can structure this in a way that has little or no cost to a Green Lake School taxpayer if everything happens how we hope and believe it will happen," Marks said. School District Administrator Ken Bates also believes there's a good chance. "It's likely. I'm optimistic that we'll get the grant," he said.

Both men stopped short of a guarantee, saying nothing is ever certain. But they hope their optimism will inspire support among the Green Lake School District residents, who still have to authorize the purchase. The district cancelled a special meeting last Wednesday because of the weather. Electors (district residents of voting age) were scheduled to decide on the 38-acre purchase. Bates indicated the School Board plans to discuss the Sunnyside matter at the regular board meeting Dec. 17 — and could set the date for another special meeting that night. The new meeting probably won't take place until after word comes on the grant, he said.

With the district looking at a \$230,000 expense, Bates said it would make most sense to know whether the grant is awarded before asking for a decision on the purchase. "With the ability now to delay the purchase until after the grant [is determined] should help ease some of the concerns taxpayers have," Bates said.

By the School Board's regular Dec. 17 meeting, the board could have a better idea of the timetable. "We'll be able to share more information," Bates said. Marks said a decision on the possible grant had been planned for this past Monday, but that decision will likely get pushed to January. Regardless if the new grant is awarded or not, district residents would have to approve the purchase if the district is to own the 38 acres. "What we have to do is purchase it and then be reimbursed for it," Bates said. "The board can't close on the property until it has approval."

While the electors will decide whether to purchase the land, the School Board does the rest by negotiating the sale price and conditions, Bates said. The school district's plans include using the historic property — frequented by former President Ulysses S. Grant — as a "learning vehicle," Bates explained. "This project is a great opportunity for our community and for our children," he said. "We need more activities to get our students outside and engaged in their surroundings."

All grades and even the public would have access to it. Students could help research and restore the land. "I think you take more pride in it if it's yours," he said. The school district aims to create "good stewards and good global citizens with a sense of community," Bates said. "Our plans are all predicated on what we can afford to do without any additional cost," he said. "We don't plan on taking a lot of money out of our current operating budget for this property."